



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Feast of All Souls | Year A



Jesus Descent into Limbo: Pietro Lorenzetti, 1320



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

RITUAL TO REMEMBER OUR DECEASED LOVED ONE

Leader:

On this feast of ALL SOULS in which we commemorate all who have gone before us, let us remember the life we shared with those who have died.

Let us pray:

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within your wounds hide me
Let me never be separated from you.
Defend me from the malicious enemy.
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto you
That I may praise you with your saints.
Forever and ever.
Amen (**Anima Christi**)*

(Optional ritual action. Catechist places a receptacle filled with sand on a pedestal. Provide a candle for each person to place in the receptacle at the appropriate time. Light the candles before the ritual action.)

OPTIONAL RITUAL ACTION

Leader:

Today we celebrate God's holy promise
that everyone who believes in Jesus shall have eternal life.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

We trust in God's mercy and are confident that our loved ones
live with Jesus and the communion of saints
in heaven with God, our loving Father.
Our Church teaches that the bonds forged in life do not end with death
but continue throughout eternity.

Let us therefore be consoled and reminded that the lives of our dearly beloved
live on forever in the arms of our loving and compassionate God
and reflect on the promise of resurrection for all of God's children.

We invite you now to come forward and present your candle in memory of your loved
one. As you place your candle in the sand,
We invite you to call the name of the person or persons
you want to remember on this day set aside to remember them.

(People bring their candles forward and place in the sand. Soft instrumental music could be played,
followed by a period of silent reflection.)

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we pray that through the death and resurrection of your Son, our Lord, Jesus
Christ, that these and all your children who have died
will rest for all eternity in your loving embrace.
May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed
rest in peace. Amen.

We ask all this through Christ our Lord.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

- ▶ What was the meaning behind the ritual we just celebrated?
- ▶ Why is it important to participate in a ritual that remembers the dead?
- ▶ If someone from another planet were to experience what we just did—carrying candles in memory of loved ones—what would you tell them that Catholics believe about death as a result of your experience?
- ▶ What is the significance of candles?

Liturgical Context

Pagans in the ancient world paid homage to their dead relatives.

- ▶ Christians maintained that practice but infused it with Christian faith.
- ▶ There is evidence dating back to the second century suggesting the Christian practice of honoring the dead.
- ▶ The deceased were prayed for and Mass was celebrated in their remembrance.
- ▶ The early communities remembered their deceased in ritual three days after death and on the year anniversary.
- ▶ Later in history another ritual observance took place seven days after death and thirty or forty days after that. It is obvious that significant attention and focus was given to honoring the deceased.
- ▶ By the seventh century an annual observance of remembering the dead was established on the day after Pentecost by Isidore, the Bishop of Seville.
- ▶ *All Souls Day* was established by the Abbott Odo of Cluny (7th c.) who insisted that all monasteries celebrate a feast in honor of the faithful departed.
- ▶ Even though the practice spread to other places, Rome did not officially declare it a feast until the thirteenth century.
- ▶ The liturgy for this day calls attention to the hope of Christian death and its intricate connection to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus—his life, mission, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Texts that were once used to express fear of damnation were replaced with texts that heralded the hope and faith in the resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ Easter is the central focus of this commemoration—the remembering of his sacrificial death and resurrection—the salvation of the world.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

Since there are multiple options for readings for today's liturgy from Masses for the Dead, it is impossible to know which option will be chosen for a particular parish. This session, therefore, will focus only on the first Gospel named among all the options. This same Gospel is proclaimed on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. There will not be time to address every Beatitude in your session. Choose those that are most appropriate for your community at this time in their faith development. Multiple questions for reflection are provided not with the intention that you will have time to use them all, but with the intention that some are more appropriate for your group than others. Use those that best apply to your particular community.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 1-12a

The format for this Gospel is different from other formats. The Beatitudes provide us with an incredible wealth of insight into the Christian life that invites serious conversion of heart. The Beatitudes constitute the New Law of the New Testament.

Thus, opportunity to reflect on each Beatitude is provided in this session. Normally there would not be time to focus on each Beatitude in a typical breaking open the word session. Thus, you will need to select and arrange. Several options are possible.

1. Choose selected Beatitudes for reflection and omit the rest;
 2. Focus only on the Beatitudes and omit reflection on the first and second reading, thus allowing more time to reflect on more of the Beatitudes;
 3. Decide ahead of time to allow more time to break open today's liturgy of the word, thus allowing time to reflect on all the readings;
 4. Continue reflection on the Beatitudes into the extended session.
- ▶ The Beatitudes launch the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teaching echoes our destiny—what we are called to become.
 - ▶ The Sermon invites us to discover our best selves.
 - ▶ It invites us to be authentic witnesses of the Gospel and to live a moral life in accord with the gospel.
 - ▶ The Beatitudes illustrate for us what it means to strive to be like God. They teach us the true meaning of love. They are evocative of the truth that God is love and that God loves us unconditionally.
 - ▶ We are to love everyone—even our enemies—because God loves everyone unconditionally. If God loves everyone who are we to deny love to others?
 - ▶ We are invited to love perfectly just as God loves us perfectly. We are to offer God's healing, reconciliation, mercy and compassion to all of God's children. Judgment is reserved for God—not for us.
 - ▶ Christ helps us look into the future. He offers us hope for a better day—a day in which peace will overpower those who clamor for war and justice will always win over oppression and marginalization of the poor.
 - ▶ When we look with hope and anticipation to such a future, we are compelled to bring it about in our present day and time.
 - ▶ Matthew's Sermon takes place on a mountain. Luke's Sermon takes place on a flat plain. The elevated height in Matthew is significant. First, when a prophet or teacher speaks from a lofty perch it means that an important teaching is taking place—a teaching imbued with God's own authority (Moses presented the Ten Commandment from a mountain top).
 - ▶ Matthew has another purpose is stressing the venue for this Sermon. When presenting the Beatitudes, Jesus is presenting the New Law. Matthew pulls no punches. Moses presented the Old Law on Mount Sinai and now from this mountain perch, Jesus presents the New Law. He is the new Moses—the new deliverer of God's people.
 - ▶ The structure of each Beatitude is divided into two parts. The first part names the negative, harmful and/or shame-filled situation. The second part looks to the future promise of resolution, healing, reward and joy.
 - ▶ The New Law Jesus set forth is not for everyone arbitrarily. The Beatitudes were given to Jesus' disciples. They are for disciples who have completely immersed themselves in Christ and the Gospel way of life. They are for those for whom Christianity is their primary focus and priority.
 - ▶ Jesus' entire mission—the mission he sacrificed his life for—is reflected in the Beatitudes.

1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of God.*

- ▶ One must not deduce from this Beatitude that God is blessing and/or approving of poverty.
- ▶ In order to understand the heart of this Beatitude one must understand the ancient concept of *hesed/Biblical justice* that is rooted in love.
- ▶ God forged a covenant with the human race at the creation of the world.
- ▶ God promised to be in reciprocal, covenant relationship with the children he created. God promised to love and care for his children. God's children in response committed to extend that same love and care toward the poor and downtrodden—to those who could not care for themselves-- and to be good stewards of all God's creation.
- ▶ Whenever poverty exists it is sure evidence that human beings are not living according to the covenant God forged with humanity.
- ▶ God insists unequivocally that the poor will be cared for in the kingdom he will establish.
- ▶ We are not to be alluded into thinking this Beatitude somehow upholds poverty as a virtue.
- ▶ There is a reason Jesus exhorted disciples to sell their possessions and be one with the powerless.
- ▶ Such powerlessness brings about the necessary freedom to become one with and reach out to the poor and powerless.
- ▶ Matthew's community was a middle class community; it was not a poor community.
- ▶ How could they to be faithful to the covenant with God and not share their wealth with others?
- ▶ Every Christian must answer the question Matthew's community struggled with—how dare we feast when so many are hungry?
- ▶ As far as Jesus is concerned the kingdom of God demands care for the poor and marginalized members of the human community.
- ▶ To turn one's back on the poor is tantamount to turning one's back on God.
- ▶ False piety often aggrandizes poverty. Jesus never upheld poverty as a blessing from God. Those who suggest that the unfettered life of the poor is something to be emulated, not having experienced poverty themselves, often have a romanticized view of it. There is nothing romantic about a growling, emaciated stomach or filthy tattered rags due to living on the street.
- ▶ Jesus always upheld the blessedness of the poor; he did not uphold the blessedness of poverty.
- ▶ Pope John insisted that spiritual poverty is blessed insofar as it reminds us that we are saved only by the grace of God who then expects that we share our blessings with others.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ In what way have you grown in your understanding of and solidarity with the poor and suffering people in this world?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that you are living according to the covenant God forged with you—that you have cared for the poor, oppressed, marginalized and downtrodden as well as for God’s creation?

2. Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted.

- ▶ There are many people in this world who endure incredible pain and suffering. As one seasoned pastor always says, “Suffering can either make you bitter or it makes you better.” Some people turn their pain, sorrow and tragedies of life into grace. Rather than become depressed and turn inward, some people reach out to others who similarly suffer. Their suffering becomes grace for others.
- ▶ Mourning and grief is blessed. When we allow it to transform our lives into a more caring, loving person, it is pure grace and we are blessed by God.
- ▶ Jesus gave his life for those who mourn. He mounted his own throne of suffering and took upon himself the sins that account for most of the pain and suffering in the world.
- ▶ Jesus has a heart for the sorrowful. He cares for them and wants to ease their grief.
- ▶ Jesus was and is a healer and a consoler; it was/is the hallmark of his ministry. Indeed he comforts those who mourn. He knows well the pain of grief—he knows what it means to have lost friends and loved ones, to be betrayed, misunderstood, lied about and sentenced to death. His own closest friends and confidants betrayed him and abandoned him.
- ▶ He would soon know how important such comfort could be. There would be no one left besides his mother and John to provide it for him.
- ▶ Most Biblical stories have a moral; the moral to the creation story is that all people are to promote a world free from human suffering, oppression and pain.
- ▶ God does not simply ask people to pray for those who suffer, God expects people to work to alleviate it. Human suffering is nothing less than an insult to God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Have you ever experienced suffering or grief in which the suffering made you better rather than bitter? Please explain.
- ▶ What does the adage “no pain, no gain” mean to you? In light of this Beatitude what are the implications?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced the healing, consoling power of Jesus in your life?
- ▶ Has anyone ever shown comfort to you in time of grief or distress? When looking back on that situation, what does it have to teach you about God’s response to you and relationship with you?
- ▶ Is there something going on in your life right now that is in need of Christ’s healing, consoling power?

3. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the land.

- ▶ The people of Israel possessed a strong, ingrained desire to covet the land; that is, to put their desire to own the land before anything else—even their desire to be in relationship with God.
- ▶ The land was a significant part of their identity. The word and concept *land* was synonymous with wealth.
- ▶ The power people were land owners.
- ▶ The Jewish people were commanded to put God before all else—even their desire to possess the land.
- ▶ God was to be the focus of their attention—not other gods and certainly not land ownership.
- ▶ The third Beatitude reveals the proper balance between prayer and action. When a disciple is in covenant relationship with God, the disciple’s responses are in right order. In other words, disciples who are in right relationship with God do not *covet* anything.
- ▶ The operative word is *covet*. When disciples no longer *covet* the land, it all belongs to them anyway. They are welcomed to enjoy it since they no longer are bound by an unhealthy attachment to it.
- ▶ Just who are the meek? The meek are those who rid themselves of all distractions in order to be in covenant relationship with God.
- ▶ A meek person does not see himself or herself as the center of the universe. A meek person is a person in whom deep conversion has taken root. Borne from that conversion is a serious responsibility toward others in the world.
- ▶ A meek person cares little for the trappings of power, prestige and wealth.
- ▶ A meek person is committed to carrying out God’s will in and for the world.

- ▶ Violence is the antithesis of meekness. Violence breeds the misuse of power, prestige and wealth.
- ▶ The land is ours anyway in response to our detachment to it; but we do inherit it because we are God's adopted children and thus inherit the land by the one who created it and gifts us with it.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Is there anything in your life that would be like “the land” was for the Israelites—that is, something you are tempted to covet, or place before your relationship with God?
- ▶ In what way have you grown in meekness in your ongoing journey with God?
- ▶ If someone were to ask you if you are meek, what would you tell them? How would you describe what it means to be a meek person?

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, they shall be satisfied.

- ▶ Survival itself requires that hunger and thirst are satisfied.
- ▶ Without food and water we die.
- ▶ The absence of food creates extreme depravation and starvation.
- ▶ Thirst taken to the extreme is synonymous with death.
- ▶ The human person is created with an insatiable hunger and thirst for God. That hunger and thirst can be dulled by lack of attention given to it.
- ▶ Hunger and thirst for God creates in us the desire to love the God who loved us first with our entire being. We are to yield to God's will in our lives.
- ▶ God demands that we yield to the demands of biblical justice—that we love God with heart, soul and mind, that we love and care for those who cannot care for themselves and that we be good stewards of all of God's creation.
- ▶ Biblical justice demands that we uphold the human dignity of every living person since every person is made in God's image.
- ▶ Not only are we to love God with heart, mind and soul that love is to extend to others—our loved ones, our neighbors, the poor and oppressed—yes, even our enemies.
- ▶ God will richly bless us when we hunger after biblical justice.
- ▶ The demands of biblical justice are as necessary to our spiritual life as water and food is to our physical lives.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Considering what biblical justice implies, have you ever hungered and thirsted for justice that demands that you love God with your whole being, and that you love yourself, your neighbor and the poor and downtrodden of this world? Please explain.
- ▶ If your answer was no, do you know of anyone who could answer yes? If so, please explain how that person hungers and thirsts after justice and what you have learned from that person?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that we are called to uphold the dignity of every human person? How does that apply to the homeless, the criminal, and those on the bottom of society? What are the implications of this for our life of discipleship?

5. Blessed are those who show mercy; they shall receive mercy.

- ▶ God is understood in the Old Testament as the divine presence who extends love, care and compassion to those who suffer. The Israelites were rescued from bondage because God heard their supplication and cries for help in the midst of oppression.
- ▶ God is experienced by the people as love and mercy—God is the embodiment of that love and mercy.
- ▶ The psalmist tells us that God is *hesed*—unending mercy; God is also *rachamim*—tender compassion and God is *hanan*—graciousness (Ps. 86:15; 136:2,3,4; 103:4; 57:2)
- ▶ God offers hope and compassion to people.
- ▶ God offers merciful and benevolent love and concern toward his people.
- ▶ God's mercy is not simply a promise for the future or as a heavenly reward; it is extended now--in the present-- to offer relief in the face of suffering.
- ▶ God offers justice for the poor; God frees people from bondage; God opens the eyes of the blind; God safeguards the immigrant, feeds the starving and cares for widows and orphans.
- ▶ Jesus is the realization and incarnation of God's tender mercies; God is *hesed*, *rachamim* and *hanan*.
- ▶ God through Christ extends mercy to who need God's mercy.
- ▶ We, in turn are to extend that same mercy to others.
- ▶ Mercy generates mercy.
- ▶ Jesus' entire healing, teaching and preaching ministry is rooted in God's tender mercies.
- ▶ Those who have experienced the mercy of God have experienced what it means

to be treasured and loved by God.

- ▶ A person who has been forgiven by God or by another person has experienced God's merciful, reconciling love.
- ▶ When we offer forgiveness and mercy to others we too are bringing about the reign of God; we too are offering God's own mercy to others.
- ▶ Where mercy is, there God is.
- ▶ A forgiving heart is a prerequisite to being in right relationship with God.
- ▶ Mercy requires that we meet people where they are—that we reach out without judgment and accept people just as they are and love them unconditionally just as Christ loves us.
- ▶ A truly merciful person is a person who offers his or life for others; Christ extended self-sacrificing, merciful love when he carried his cross to Calvary and was crucified as an act of extreme love for humanity—for the sake of all people. Never has anyone demonstrated such powerful self-sacrificing mercy in the history of the world.
- ▶ Jesus, our brother, savior, teacher, preacher, missionary and Lord—an innocent man convicted of a capital crime--willingly endured torture and a horrific death to show humanity how far God's love was willing to go in order to save us.
- ▶ Mercy leads us to the cross of Christ. We continue to experience that self-sacrificing mercy every time we celebrate the Eucharist—when the sacrifice of Calvary is re-presented for us over and over again.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ What is mercy?
- ▶ In what way do we extend mercy to others?
- ▶ Has anyone ever shown mercy to you? In what way, if any, did it impact your life?
- ▶ Have you ever shown mercy to another person? In what way did it impact that person's life?
- ▶ How important do you think God considers mercy to be? Explain the reason for your answer.

6. Blessed are the pure of heart; they shall see God.

- ▶ The sixth Beatitude is to be understood within the context of the twenty-fourth psalm:
- ▶ “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
- ▶ And who shall stand in his holy place?
 - He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

- Who does not lift up his soul to what is false
- And does not swear deceitfully.
- He will receive blessing from the Lord,
- And vindication from the God of his salvation.
- Such is the generation of those who seek him;
- Who seek the face of God. (3-6)
- ▶ The psalmist asks who really is worthy to enter the Lord's sanctuary?
- ▶ In the Old Testament "seeking the face of God" was the same as being admitted into the Temple and the Divine Presence.
- ▶ The psalmist insists that living a moral life is a pre-requisite to genuine worship.
- ▶ Living a moral life was synonymous with observing the Ten Commandments—abstaining from cheating one's neighbor, coveting one's wife, making false statements, harming, maiming and causing the death of another.
- ▶ Jesus insists that one must live a life of integrity if he or she hopes to enter the reign of God.
- ▶ One can be confident of seeing the face of God on the last day if he or she lived moral lives of integrity and authentically worshipped God.
- ▶ The ancients interpreted "*To see God*" to mean dwelling in God's presence.
- ▶ One who is pure of heart is in intimate, covenant relationship with God and desires nothing more than to follow God's will and plan for his or her life.
- ▶ To be in covenant relationship with God means that one has a duty to live ethical, moral lives.
- ▶ A person who is pure of heart is a person who loves God with heart, mind and soul; who loves other people as he or she loves the self and who takes responsibility to be good stewards of the world entrusted to his or her care.
- ▶ Jesus was an example of what it means to be pure of heart—he was *one* with God; he enjoyed intimate union.
- ▶ Jesus' sacrificed his entire life in response to the love and will of his Father.
- ▶ When we love God as Christ loved God we too hunger and thirst for intimate union and will sacrifice everything in order to be in right relationship with God.
- ▶ Our heart (interior) must be in sync with our actions (exterior). Conversion of heart is accompanied by discernable evidence of that conversion.
- ▶ To be pure of heart means that we are willing to enter into kenosis—a submission and a self-emptying in which we, empty vessels that we are, are filled with the all-consuming love and purpose of God.
- ▶ To be pure of heart is synonymous with trust. The pure of heart know that God will never forsake them and are willing to stake their lives on it.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ If a person were to ask you if you live a life of integrity how would you respond? What evidence is there in your life that you do indeed live a life of integrity? Where is growth needed?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that you possess a pure heart?
- ▶ “To see God” means to dwell in God’s presence. Have you ever had the experience of “seeing God?” In other words have you ever been aware of God’s presence in your life? Describe the experience and what it taught you about God.
- ▶ If you have not had direct experience, what evidence is there in your life that God indeed is and has been present?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when we say that God invites us to self-empty? In what way have you ever or might you be called to become empty vessels so God can fill you? What needs to be emptied? With needs to take the place of what you have emptied?

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God.

- ▶ *Peace* is a word far richer in biblical parlance than in our English understanding of the term.
- ▶ The Biblical etymology of the word *peace* comes from the first covenant God made with human beings at the creation of the world. God created the world and everything in it. God placed man and woman in the Garden of Eden. God intended that all creation coexist in perfect harmony. That harmony God intended was referred to as *shalom/peace*.
- ▶ The peace of Eden meant that everything and everyone was in right relationship with the Creator.
- ▶ God entered into a covenant with the human race and as such promised to love, provide and care for every human person. Every human person in turn promised to love God with heart, mind and soul and extend that love to others—especially those who could not care for themselves.
- ▶ Christ restored the peace of Eden that was lost when human beings sinned.
- ▶ The Holy Spirit gifts us with the ongoing gift of Christ’s peace; yet there is a responsibility attached.
- ▶ We are to pursue peace—we are to be makers of peace. The psalmist tells us in Psalm 34 that we are to seek peace and pursue it (14).
- ▶ We are not to let the sun go down on discord; rather, it is enjoined upon us to seek peace. It is God’s will.
- ▶ A sign that the kingdom of God has arrived is the establishment of peace for all

peoples and all nations. Thus, it is obvious that the kingdom of God has not yet arrived in its fullness.

- ▶ However, the kingdom has begun and is evident when two or more are gathered in Jesus' name and living the intended peace of Eden—a life of reciprocal, intimate relationship with God—a peace-filled, harmonious life with God that extends to others in the world.
- ▶ Evil—not peace—reigns when sin has its way—when families are ruptured, contracts are broken, friendships betrayed and good relations between nations are severed.
- ▶ The only antidote to evil and its consequences is for believers to embrace Jesus' exhortation to be peacemakers.
- ▶ We envision Isaiah's future day when lambs will lie peacefully with lions. That day is yet to come but it is nonetheless an object of our hope.
- ▶ Matthew promised his community that they could expect the restoration promised by Isaiah only to the extent that they lived according to the new principles of love established by Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus--Messiah, Lord, the Promised One of Israel—is the One anointed by God who came to gather the people of Israel and all the people of the world into one fold and restore the shalom peace of Eden.
- ▶ Jesus not only preached the Beatitudes; he lived them. We are to follow his example.
- ▶ Jesus' primary objective was to live in intimate union with his Father and to live the covenant in perfect harmony with the Father's perfect will.
- ▶ He extended love to the poorest of the poor, the lowliest of the low and the most unclean and despised of them all. Jesus was not afraid to roll up his sleeves, dirty his hands and risk ritual impurity for the sake of God's people.
- ▶ Jesus extended shalom to everyone—especially those who the religious elite of his day considered sinful, cut off from God and ritually impure. We can do no less. No one is undeserving of our love and the extension of our peace.
- ▶ Verse nine in the NAB translation insists that the peacemakers will be called *children of God*. The use of the word *children* co-opted an earlier translation that used the word *sons*. *Sons of God* hearkens back to an image in the Book of Genesis in which the *sons of God* are referred to as angels or divine beings that minister in the heavenly court.
- ▶ Matthew echoes this image as a reminder that the promise Jesus is making is reserved for the kingdom yet to come in heaven when all disciples will reach their final reward and destiny—dwelling forever with the Divine Presence.
- ▶ If we are faithful to the covenant and live as Jesus taught us to live—as peacemakers in a divided world--then we can rest assured we will enjoy the beatific vision and reign as God's children for all eternity.
- ▶ The *shalom of God* was a sign of the end of time.
- ▶ Jesus inaugurated that shalom in the new kingdom he established.
- ▶ We are to continue what Jesus started.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ In what way are you a peacemaker?
- ▶ In your home and workplace do you bring about peace or do you help instigate discord? If the latter is true, what steps can you take to change it?
- ▶ How might you be a peacemaker in your place of work, your parish or your family experience? In your opinion what characteristics should a peacemaker possess?

8. Blessed are those persecuted for justice' sake; the reign of God is theirs.

- ▶ Disciples can expect this Beatitude as a consequence of living the previous seven.
- ▶ Matthew's Church was a fledgling Church. Persecution was inevitable as Gospel living naturally brought attention to those who lived it.
- ▶ The superiority and authority of civic and religious ruling powers are often challenged by those who faithfully observe the Beatitudes. Peacemakers, for example, frequently are compelled to confront the ruling powers in the face of injustice.
- ▶ When authority and control is threatened there is backlash. Christians were on the receiving end of that backlash.
- ▶ Jesus was sent to the cross for his faithfulness to his Father's will.
- ▶ Discipleship is synonymous with the cross. To be a disciple means that one is willing to endure persecution, suffer and die for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ The Old Testament and the New Testament reveal a tension between light and darkness. The light always meets resistance.
- ▶ This Beatitude is presented last by way of hope, encouragement and consolation in the face of persecution.
- ▶ Persecution for the Christian was proof positive that they were living the gospel.
- ▶ Those who endure persecution for the sake of the Gospel can be assured that they will enjoy the eschatological, eternal reign of God both now and in the age to come.
- ▶ We have a hagiographic hall of fame to remind us of this truth—the communion of saints. The Church will always be purified and strengthened and uplifted by the blood of martyrs.
- ▶ This last Beatitude is a reminder to believers as to what they can expect if they are faithful in living the other seven—they will experience persecution and suffering.
- ▶ Rest assured, disciples, your reward in heaven is great!



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites the group to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Have you ever experienced persecution for doing the right thing, for living according to the principles set forth in the Beatitudes? What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ Which Beatitude is the most challenging for you?
- ▶ What does it mean concretely in your own life to be faithful to God?
- ▶ What are some concrete obstacles to your consistent faithfulness?
- ▶ Why is goodness frequently met with resistance?
- ▶ Why do you suppose good Gospel living brings about persecution?

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

The Beatitudes are to the New testament what the Ten Commandments are to the Old Testament. They are the *NEW LAW* for Christians. If we do not live according to these precepts we are not following Christ and we are not working to help establish his kingdom in our world. Let us pray for the strength to follow the Beatitudes in all that we believe, say and do.

THE PRAYER, O LORD MY GOD

O Lord my God.

*Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

(By Saint Anselm.)

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

► In what way are you a peacemaker?

I know what it means to be called by God to be a peacemaker in the midst of a tense and angry situation. The situation required that I challenge the behavior of another person toward a group of people. I was dripping with self-righteous anger over the situation. Keeping in mind that I am a master at conflict avoidance, I tried unsuccessfully to shirk my responsibility and pass it off to another person. Thus, armed with my anger and my intent to pounce like a lion, I was prepared to offer one “or else” after another. Thank God I had the presence of mind to pray before the encounter. I asked God to help me make the most loving, though firm case possible and to at least try to have a compassionate, listening heart.

Had I gone into the situation with my initial anger and plan to pounce the outcome would have had far reaching consequences that were not in accord with the will of God. And it would have perpetuated not only my anger but the anger of others. It would have kept the flames of rage burning indefinitely.

I listened to the person, acknowledged misunderstanding where that was applicable, challenged behavior where it needed to be challenged, helped to suggest and create a peaceful resolution to the situation. As a result, we experienced a peace-filled outcome. The situation was resolved with assurances that it would not be a problem in the future and peace was restored to all the people involved.

Had I yielded to my original feelings and emotions I am not so sure things would have turned out as well. I took the time to pray and listen to God. I guess that is what a peacemaker does. My hope is that I could approach every situation in my life with the foresight to ask for God’s wisdom, strength and peace rather than let my personal emotions take command. The art of peacemaking is so important, yet so often we prefer to stir the pot and keep tensions and emotions brewing. I often wonder why we as humans enjoy getting so caught up in divisive, gossip-filled situations? The Beatitudes are there to show us a better way to live and respond to the challenges of life.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from the celebration of the liturgy:

Heaven Hell, Purgatory, Eschatology

Morality

Salvation

Moral Decision Making

Kingdom of God

Life Issues

Catholic Social Teaching

Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

HEAVEN, HELL PURGATORY/ESCHATOLOGY

Jesus instructs his disciples about what it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. When we live the Beatitudes with a pure heart we can be confident that we will enjoy eternal life with God. On this feast of All Souls it is appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the afterlife-- HEAVEN, HELL, PURGATORY/ESCHATOLOGY.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Jesus instructs his disciples about what it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. When we live the Beatitudes with a pure heart we can be confident that we will enjoy eternal life with God. Such is the definition of salvation. On this feast of All Souls it is appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION also known as SOTERIOLOGY.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus preached the kingdom and the evangelist Matthew preached Jesus. Today he instructed his disciples on what it means to live the Christian life, be saved and enjoy everlasting life. We celebrate the saints who have gone before us. They too live in the kingdom: we live in the kingdom now—and they passed to the kingdom that is for us *not yet*. Jesus teaches his followers what it means to be citizens in the reign he came to establish. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's great salvific enterprise that was to take place in the last age. Jesus inaugurates the fulfillment of that promise. Thus, it is a most appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus instructs his disciples about what it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. Jesus upholds the dignity of all persons in the Beatitudes. He upholds the poor, the pure of heart, the meek, those who search for justice, the merciful, and the peacemakers. He gave us a blue print for the dignity and equality of the human family. The Beatitudes give us the theology that underpins our social mission in the Church today. It is thus a most appropriate occasion to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

LIFE ISSUES

Jesus instructs what his disciples about it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. In today's Gospel Jesus presents us with the law of love—the law that upholds the dignity of all persons—the Beatitudes. If we uphold every person's equality and dignity in the eyes of God we must hold and uphold that all life is sacred—from womb to tomb. Thus today is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about LIFE since Jesus presents us with a blueprint for living it to the fullest. Today's doctrinal session will focus on LIFE ISSUES.

MORALITY

Jesus instructs his disciples about what it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. He presents the Beatitudes—the law based on love—the law that constitutes what is upright and moral in the eyes of God. Eternal life assumes that the life a person lived is a moral life. It is thus important that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about morality.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Jesus instructs his disciples about what it means to be saved and enjoy everlasting life. He presents the Beatitudes—the law based on love—the law that constitutes what is upright and moral in the eyes of God. Eternal life assumes that the life a person lived is a moral life. How then do we know what is moral? How do we know how to make moral decisions? Today's doctrinal session will focus on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.



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